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AUSTRALIAN STATISTICS ADVISORY COUNCIL

Annual Report 1989-90

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Annual Report

1989-90

Australian Government Publishing Service

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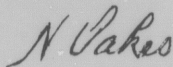
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The Honourable Paul Keating, M.P.
Treasurer of the Commonwealth of Australia

I have pleasure in submitting the Report of the Australian Statistics Advisory Council for the year ended 30 June 1990.

The Report outlines the work undertaken by the Council and is submitted to you for presentation to Parliament under section 24(2) of the *Australian Bureau of Statistics Act 1975*.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "N Oakes". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

N. OAKES
Chairman

10 August 1990

MEETINGS OF COUNCIL 1989-90

12 July 1989

8-9 November 1989

2 May 1990

MEMBERSHIP OF COUNCIL, 30 JUNE 1990

Meetings attended
1989-90

Mr Norman Oakes, AO	Chairman	3
Mr Ian Castles, AO, OBE	Australian Statistician (ex officio)	3
Mrs Yvonne Bain, AM	President, National Council of Women of Queensland	3
Mr Grant Belchamber	Research Officer, Australian Council of Trade Unions	nil
Dr Lisa Brodribb, AM	Managing Director, M. Brodribb Pty Ltd	3
Mr Don Challen	Deputy Secretary, Department of Treasury and Finance, Tasmania	nil 3 proxies
Dr Neil Conn	Under Treasurer, The Treasury, Northern Territory	1 2 proxies
Mr John Fraser	Deputy Secretary (Economic), Department of the Treasury	n.a.
Mr Ross Holt	Director, Economic Policy Division, Department of the Treasury, Western Australia	1, 1 proxy
Dr Neil Johnston	Deputy Secretary, Department of Employment, Education and Training	3

Prof Peter Karmel, AC, CBE	Chairman, Australian Institute of Health	3
Mr Ian Macfarlane	Head of Research, Reserve Bank of Australia	2, 1 proxy
Mr John Macleod	Group Economist, CRA Ltd	nil
Dr Richard Madden	Under Treasurer, ACT Treasury	3
Dr Jacqueline Morgan	Executive Member, Privacy Committee of New South Wales	2
Prof Max Neutze	Deputy Vice Chancellor, Australian National University	3
Mr Robert Schwarz	Assistant General Manager, Financial and Credit Policy, South Australian Government Financing Authority	2, 1 proxy
Mr Robert Scullion	Assistant Secretary, New South Wales Treasury	2, 1 proxy
Dr Alfred Smith	Director, Resources and Development Division, Department of the Premier and Cabinet, Victoria	nil 3 proxies
Mr David Smith	Director, Statistical Services, Government Statistician's Office, Queensland	3
Mr David Stanton	First Assistant Secretary Performance and Control Division, Department of Social Security	n.a.
Mr Michael Tooth, AM	Former President, NSW Farmers' Association	2
Prof Richard Tweedie	Dean, Information and Computing Sciences, Bond University	2

Changes in membership since 30 June 1989

September 1989	Mr A.M.D. Tooth, AM appointed.
November 1989	Dr C.I. Higgins resigned, having served on the Council since 1985.
April 1990	Dr M.A. Edwards resigned, having served on the Council since 1988.
May 1990	Mr G.W.H. Penn retired from the Council at the conclusion of his term of appointment having served on the Council since 1987.
June 1990	Mr J. Fraser appointed Mr D. Stanton appointed

Council records with appreciation the contribution made by the retiring members to the work of the Council.

Note: In this Report, after the first reference, the Australian Statistics Advisory Council is referred to as ASAC or the Council, and the Australian Bureau of Statistics as the ABS or the Bureau.

Freedom of Information Act 1982

Under section 8 of the *Freedom of Information Act* 1982 Commonwealth agencies are required to publish a statement about their organisation, functions, decision-making powers, consultative arrangements, categories of documents maintained, and facilities and procedures to enable members of the public to obtain access to documents under the Act.

The relevant statement for ASAC appears as an appendix to this Report.

No requests for access to documents under the FOI Act were received by ASAC during the year.

INTRODUCTION

The Australian Statistics Advisory Council was established by the *Australian Bureau of Statistics Act 1975*.

This is the fourteenth Annual Report of the Council, and is made in accordance with section 24(2) of the Act which provides that: 'the Council shall, as soon as practicable after 30 June in each year, prepare and submit to the Minister, for presentation to the Parliament, a report relating to matters connected with the operation of this Act'.

Under section 18(1) of the *Australian Bureau of Statistics Act 1975* the Council is to advise the Minister and the Australian Statistician on:

- (a) *the improvement, extension and co-ordination of statistical services provided for public purposes in Australia;*
- (b) *annual and longer term priorities and programs of work that should be adopted in relation to major aspects of the provision of those statistical services; and*
- (c) *any other matters relating generally to those statistical services.*

The Act enables the Minister or the Australian Statistician to seek the advice of the Council on these matters. The Council also offers advice on these matters to the Minister or the Australian Statistician when it considers it appropriate to do so.

The Act provides that the Council shall consist of a part-time Chairman, the Australian Statistician (ex officio), and between ten and twenty-two part-time members, including one nominee of each State Premier and the Chief Ministers of the two Territories. The Chairman and members are appointed by the responsible Minister – currently the Treasurer – for periods of five years and up to three years respectively, and are eligible for reappointment.

The Chairman receives an annual fee, set by the Remuneration Tribunal, and members are reimbursed their travel costs, where applicable. Expenditure during 1989-90 totalled \$38629.

Secretariat and administrative support for the Council's activities are provided by the ABS. The secretary of the Council is the Assistant Statistician, Resource Effectiveness Branch, whose address is PO Box 10, Belconnen, ACT 2616 – telephone (06)252 5256.

SUMMARY OF THE YEAR'S ACTIVITIES

In recent years, the pressures imposed by continuing severe resource constraints have become an ongoing feature of the operating environment of many public sector agencies. In this environment Council is impressed with the emphasis placed by the ABS on improving its existing services without ignoring the introduction of new products and services which are relevant to pressing contemporary needs for reliable data. A major factor enabling the ABS to achieve this has been the increased emphasis on revenue generation, including user-funded projects, a development which Council supports in principle. However, Council remains concerned that revenue generation should not supplant the policy and social significance of statistics as the main determinant of the content of the ABS's work program and takes the view that revenue generation can cover only a small portion of the Bureau's activities. Council welcomes the Bureau's assurance that its thrust to market its products and services better, and thereby earn additional revenue, involves no departure from its commitment to meet the statistical needs of government and the community at large.

ABS forward work program 1990-91 to 1992-93

Council dedicated most of the time available at its November 1989 and May 1990 meetings to consideration of the ABS forward work program for 1990-91 to 1992-93. In addressing an anticipated salaries shortfall over the next three years Council was faced with the difficult task of examining the priorities of a number of existing projects and identifying opportunities for worthwhile resource savings while, at the same time, making it possible for the work program to accommodate important new projects.

Council supports the initiatives currently being considered for improving efficiency, including the trial of National Project Centres, installation of an improved communications infrastructure, review of sample sizes, rationalisation of input editing and the introduction of improved personnel and accounting systems.

Council considers that improved efficiencies rather than program cuts should be used to achieve the savings required as a result of the application of the service-wide 1.25% Efficiency Dividend and the Structural Efficiency Principle pay increases. However, the impact of such changes on the human resources of the Bureau needs careful consideration and Council acknowledges that care is required when examining particular measures for improving the efficiency of the ABS. For example, while further devolution of some statistical collections to other agencies, both State and Commonwealth, might reduce costs for the ABS, this might be achieved at the expense of the effectiveness of the overall statistical service in terms of total cost and reliability.

In its detailed consideration of the proposed work program Council has welcomed the adoption by the ABS of suggestions made by Council in its 1988-89 Annual Report and supports:

- The development of a small time use survey, to be run in 1991-92, to complement the data collected in 1987.
- The international trade in services collection.
- The development of State input-output tables by State agencies, with advice and assistance from the ABS, and the further development by the ABS of State Gross Product statistics.

Council has discussed at some length initiatives aimed at reducing the extent of revisions to national accounts data and strongly supports the high priority being given to work associated with Integrated Register quality improvement, the Large Business Units groups, the use of taxation data, without breaching confidentiality, and the introduction of economy wide surveys. This work should ultimately result in significant improvements in the quality of national accounts data. In addition Council supports the work being undertaken in the classification, integration and development program to facilitate the production of comparable production, import and export statistics.

Other important components of the work program of particular interest to Council include:

- Compilation of quarterly flow of funds statistics; this is proving a low cost exercise with the potential to improve the quality of the Australian National Accounts.
- A proposed survey of returned Australian travellers, to improve the benchmark estimates of travel debits in the Balance of Payments. If proved feasible in pilot testing, the survey will be conducted regularly, perhaps on a triennial basis.
- The full Manufacturing Census and a Mining Census for 1989-90.
- The establishment of a focus for housing statistics in the ABS, drawing on the housing-related collections of all areas of the ABS.
- The 1991 Census of Population and Housing.
- The conduct of the next 5 yearly review of the CPI based on the results of the 1989 Household Expenditure Survey.

Council has closely monitored the increased emphasis being placed by the ABS on revenue raising in its efforts to meet the revenue targets set by the Government. A major benefit to emerge from this more commercial environment has been better knowledge of user demand for statistical products and services.

Council has suggested that the Bureau needs to constantly review its products and services to ensure that they remain relevant to evolving user requirements and supports further effort in the marketing of ABS statistics and services. Some poor quality products in the electronic dissemination field have been identified. Council understands that the ABS is already taking positive steps to make significant improvements to these products.

Council supports the involvement of the ABS in joint venture funding arrangements and endorses the following measures being developed by the Bureau to raise more revenue from its users:

- Seeking funding for approximately one quarter of the cost of the Input-Output program. Council is hopeful that such funding will be forthcoming to support this project at a viable level, particularly if the timeliness of input-output tables can be improved.
- Establishment of a national crime statistics unit supported by user funding.
- Inclusion of a user-funded national crime victims survey in the household survey program.
- Selective extension of statistical consultancy services.

Council has also suggested that the ABS should seek user funding for detailed data relating to local governments in the public sector accounts program, a proposed domestic travel expenditure survey, and a private sector health establishments survey. It considers that all special purpose collections conducted essentially to satisfy the data requirements of a very limited number of major users, should be funded by clients.

Council appreciates that the ABS is likely to continue to face demands from many users for a wider range of statistical services without extra resources being made available, but is confident that ABS forward planning processes will address these as they arise, and that the ABS will bring them to Council's attention at the appropriate time.

Council is also confident that the statistical service provided by the Bureau remains well balanced and relevant to the evolving needs of users and has endorsed the ABS forward work program for 1990-91 to 1992-93. Council has written to the Minister indicating its support.

Review of ABS Economic Indicators

At its July 1989 meeting Council considered a report prepared by a team of senior ABS officers following their examination of the appropriateness of economic indicators currently produced by the ABS. Council understands that work is

proceeding on implementing a number of the report's recommendations. In particular, the quarterly publication of expected sales by manufacturers has been introduced and State-based indexes of manufacturing production are being developed. In addition, a prototype of a new monthly publication summarising key economic indicators, to complement the Treasury's "Economic Round-up", has been market tested and its development is continuing. Other work in progress includes analysis of the revisions to the national accounts figures with a view to further development of reliability indicators for various aggregates, improvement to the services components of the Balance of Payments, improved coverage of foreign investment in real estate, and development of indexes of house and land prices.

Timeliness of statistics has been a continuing topic of discussion and, although the ABS already compares well with its counterparts overseas, Council welcomes the steps being taken by the Bureau for further improvement by revising processing strategies and improving the availability of input data.

Some Council members have reservations concerning the development of compendium publications containing statistics from various sources, especially if some of these are of doubtful reliability, and the intention of the ABS to provide some economic analysis rather than concentrate solely on the collection and dissemination of statistics. In particular, Council believes that the ABS should proceed very cautiously when developing indexes where their value is open to public debate. A number of such measures, based on different assumptions and interpretations of economic theory, have already been developed by other bodies and some members feel it inappropriate for the ABS, through the publication of a particular index, to appear to give its imprimatur to a particular economic view of the world which might be open to question. Similar reservations were expressed concerning suggestions for the production of an index of housing affordability, and Council considers that it might be more effective in the first instance to concentrate on obtaining reliable information on house prices, mortgage sizes and interest rates.

Council generally agrees with the approach adopted by the ABS to give priority to the enhancement of existing indicators rather than to the generation of new series, and has suggested that the Bureau should concentrate on improving the quality and timeliness of existing series.

Council acknowledges that production and use of statistics are closely related and that the direct involvement of suitably qualified Bureau officers in analytical work would help to ensure that the type of data collected and the information disseminated by the ABS remain relevant. However, Council has suggested that the ABS should not present commentary which could be construed as part of the economic policy debate. A recent example of ABS involvement in analytical work which was well-received was the paper presented to the Economic Planning Advisory Council, and subsequently published, on multi-factor productivity.

Tourism Statistics

During Council's consideration of the ABS forward work program at its November 1988 meeting there was some discussion of the emerging need for more comprehensive information on tourism and the ABS was asked to prepare a paper which would attempt to determine the boundaries of the tourism sector and identify a range of relevant existing and new data. This paper was considered by Council at its November 1989 meeting.

A central and widely recognised problem in analysing data relating to tourism is that tourism lacks clear definition and is not treated as an industry in the Australian Standard Industrial Classification but is composed of a cluster of activities undertaken by many different industries. Because these provide services to other people as well as tourists, it is very difficult to obtain satisfactory measures of tourism by referring to data from the supply (or industry) side. Two main approaches are used to measure tourism: industry based surveys to obtain data on the supply of services to tourists/travellers, and household or destination based surveys to obtain information from the tourists themselves on the consumption of those services. Each of these approaches has shortcomings. While there are some difficulties in developing a suitable methodology for household based surveys of tourism, the proposed Domestic Travel Expenditure Survey is expected to provide extensive data on patterns of tourist expenditure. The lack of these data has been identified by the Bureau of Tourism Research and the Industries Commission as a major gap in the range of statistics currently available.

Presently, the ABS collects monthly tourist accommodation data (on a quarterly basis) and monthly statistics on overseas arrivals and departures. ABS data in respect of 1986-87 are also available on tourism related service industries and tourist attractions. Other data sources include the International Visitors Survey and the Domestic Tourism Monitor conducted by the Bureau of Tourism Research, the figures for which are published annually. Council recognises that the ABS is part of a network of relevant government agencies including the Bureau of Tourism Research, and that there has been ongoing liaison in relation to the collection of data, timeliness requirements and the development of a tourism data base.

Expected future ABS activities in the tourism field include the development of an annual compendium publication, enhancement of the tourist accommodation collection, the development of the Domestic Travel Expenditure Survey and the introduction of an electronic data base, which could incorporate Bureau of Tourism Research data. Council understands that the Australian Standard Industrial Classification will also be reviewed to identify those industries providing substantial services to tourism as a basis for providing a more systematic profile of tourism activity.

Council notes the deficiencies in information on the overall contribution to the economy made by tourism and recognises that something more than the current range of partial indicators on tourism is required. It is important for data on tourism

to show a distinction between overseas visitors and domestic travellers, and for considerable improvement to be made in the quality of the available data on spending by overseas visitors in Australia and on the expenditure of Australian residents overseas to ensure they are reliable components of the Balance of Payments statistics. A proposed survey of returned Australian travellers, to be tested by the ABS next year, should help to fill this gap.

Council supports the proposed ABS coordination role and suggests that it would be appropriate for the ABS to develop a framework and strategy for tourism statistics. As a first step it would be useful to assemble a guide to available data. Once a package of coordinated collections has been proposed, major users should be invited to contribute the necessary funds as interest in many of these collections would be industry specific. In view of the considerable funds currently spent on obtaining a variety of different indicators relevant to tourism, the ABS tourist accommodation survey and the proposed Domestic Travel Expenditure Survey could be undertaken with user funding.

ABS Marketing Plan

Council suggested in its 1988-89 Annual Report that a greater investment in ABS marketing activities would significantly increase the Bureau's revenue. Council notes that the ABS is now directing more effort to marketing and that, in giving high priority to improving the relevance and responsiveness of its products and services, the ABS is increasingly embracing a client-oriented rather than the more product-oriented approach previously adopted. A key ingredient of marketing strategy in the commercial sector is the creation of demand, an aspect which calls for careful appraisal by the Bureau, given the source and nature of much of its data.

At its July 1989 meeting Council considered the first ABS Marketing Plan. Some members regard the Marketing Plan as demonstrating how far the ABS has progressed in a short period and are encouraged by the willingness of the Bureau to actively seek out new markets and explore improved ways of assisting its customers.

Council understands that the "cultural change" necessary to operate effectively within the new marketing environment is already occurring at middle and senior levels within the ABS. However, some Council members have commented that the ABS still needs to concentrate on improving its client orientation. Council has suggested that the Plan needs to be more outward looking and that more emphasis should be given to promoting the corporate image of the ABS as a reliable provider of accurate statistical products and services which are timely and relevant to the needs of users.

Council has been advised that budgetary problems some public sector client organisations have experienced in responding to the new user pays environment has made it difficult for them to secure adequate funding for statistical products and services, especially high cost items, such as computer tapes containing unidentifiable unit records. Council recognises that this represents a transitional

problem but considers that, until client organisations receive budgetary allocations for statistical products and services, there is a danger that, with the high cost of data collections, the use of ABS products and services and the benefits deriving from them will be reduced.

National Health Survey

Throughout the year Council has closely followed the progress of the 1989-90 National Health Survey. The survey will produce important benchmark data for the population as a whole, providing a valuable resource for epidemiological studies which could lead to the targeting of specific prevention policies for those population groups most at risk.

An important strategy adopted by the ABS during the development and conduct of the survey was to consult widely and keep the community well informed to foster widespread general appreciation of the importance of the survey. The consultation included users, organisations concerned with health matters, privacy interest groups, Parliamentarians and the community at large. Strong statements of support for the survey were issued by the National Women's Consultative Council and a number of other influential bodies concerned with health matters. There was little public debate about the survey until its media launch in September which resulted in a number of well-balanced reports.

Criticism of the National Health Survey came from several Members of the Commonwealth Parliament. The criticism focused on claims that the survey was compulsory, that the explanation to potential respondents of the basis of their participation was inadequate and that the womens' health questionnaire represented an unwarranted invasion of individual privacy. Some Members wrote to a number of organisations which had expressed their support for the survey and urged them to reconsider their support. One Member asked the Privacy Commissioner to explore a number of matters and, shortly afterwards, wrote to all Council members suggesting that they meet to examine several issues he had raised about the survey. Council's response indicated its strong support for the ABS approach in seeking willing cooperation in all of its household surveys, its satisfaction with the extent to which the ABS kept it informed about the National Health Survey and its view that there was no need for a special meeting to be convened.

Council understands that the Privacy Commissioner has completed his examination of the privacy issues raised concerning the survey and is satisfied that none remains outstanding. A number of organisations, including the Australian Institute of Health and the Public Health Association, have reiterated their support for the survey. Even greater support came from State government agencies in three States which funded an increase in the sample size in their States to improve the precision of the results at a regional level.

The conduct of the survey itself has been little affected by the criticism earlier in the year and is attracting a high level of support. Council understands that response

rates are consistent with expectations and that there has been a particularly good response to the women's health questionnaire.

Use of Time Use Survey Data

At its May meeting Council considered separate papers submitted by the Office of the Status of Women and the National Women's Consultative Council. A representative of the Office of the Status of Women attended the meeting to elaborate on the Office's paper which had been prepared in response to a request made at the November meeting when it had been suggested that Council would be better placed to offer advice on a time use survey if the uses to which such a survey might be put in a policy setting were clarified.

Council was advised that very little data were available on unpaid work and household activities and that output from a time use survey would provide valuable new measures which would have important implications for government policy makers and which would also be useful to non government organisations and researchers. A number of possible policy applications for time use data were outlined for Council and some emphasis was placed on the importance attached to such data by relevant United Nations agencies, particularly in relation to work being undertaken to develop appropriate measures of the value of unpaid work as satellites of the national accounts.

Council members have commented that the survey should not be gender based and should not be confined to unpaid household activities. Much valuable but unpaid work is undertaken in family businesses and by volunteers in non-profit organisations. Council recognises that data on the latter would be especially important for policy makers concerned with possible implications arising from potential pressures for governments having to consider supplementing or replacing the functions carried out by such organisations. Council endorses the support the ABS has given to the development of time use surveys.

Council notes that the ABS has budgeted sufficient funds to conduct a time use survey of about 2000 households in 1991-92 and fully appreciates the Bureau's decision not to commit itself to a larger survey until major users have developed clearer ideas on how the complex data from such a survey could meet their needs. In a situation where potential users have experienced difficulty in interpreting the data already available and where important definitional issues still need to be resolved in the United Nations work being undertaken to develop satellite accounts, Council supports the cautious approach adopted by the ABS.

1991 Population Census

Council has maintained a keen interest in the Population Census and, throughout the year, has monitored developments towards the next Census, to be held on 6 August 1991. During the year a major test of some 10,000 dwellings was conducted in Brisbane and a nearby Queensland country area, together with a test aimed at

Aboriginal communities in a remote area of Western Australia. Following an evaluation of the results only fine tuning of a small number of questions was required.

A full dress rehearsal, involving 20000 dwellings in Melbourne and a nearby Victorian country area, will be conducted in August 1990. Its main purpose will be to test the coordination of all the operational components involved in the conduct of the Census, such as the printing, distribution and return of forms, as well as their processing.

The Data Processing Centre in Sydney used for the 1986 Census has been obtained once again for ABS use from July 1990 until the end of 1992 and will be used both for the dress rehearsal and the Census proper.

One problem encountered when the tender specifications were being prepared for form printing, was the small number of printers capable of meeting the very high printing standards required for the optical mark recognition forms to be used. Difficulties associated with the use of optical mark recognition technology led to some slippage in the testing program for computer assisted coding but this has now been remedied. For the first time the ABS will be managing the whole of the field collection operation itself and not relying on the Australian Electoral Office as in the past. The arrangements for training and for the procedures to be followed are progressing smoothly.

Work is also in progress to develop strategies for the output from the Census. Based on experience from the 1986 Census, some rationalisation of the content of the output and its means of dissemination will be required to rationalise the number and variety of products offered. A close examination of the revenue raising potential of different products is currently underway. Users are being closely consulted and a number of workshops and seminars to elicit their detailed requirements have been held in various States. At this stage the output timetable involves the production of preliminary results in June 1992, summary data in the second half of 1992 and detailed figures being progressively released from the first half of 1993. If this timetable is met it will represent a significant improvement on the times achieved with the 1986 Census.

Study Papers by Council Members

The practice of individual Council members presenting study papers on aspects of statistics of particular concern to their organisations is now well established and five papers were discussed during the year. The authors were Mr Don Challen, Dr Meredith Edwards (who resigned from Council in April 1990), Professor Peter Karmel, Dr Jacqueline Morgan and Professor Richard Tweedie.

Mr Challen's paper which, in his absence, was presented by Ms Rebekah Burton, was on statistical priorities and problems in a small State. The paper outlined some of the difficulties experienced by small States in obtaining useful statistical output in

the face of the restrictions imposed by the confidentiality provisions of the statistics legislation and from small samples, and described a number of measures taken jointly by Tasmanian Government agencies and the ABS to improve the statistical service to the State. Council acknowledges the lack of realistic opportunities for significantly overcoming those deficiencies in statistical output arising essentially from small size but is encouraged by the steps being taken to maximise the usefulness of the data available.

Dr Edwards' paper explained the focus of the Department of Social Security on the broad needs of particular groups such as the aged, the disabled, the unemployed, the sick and families with children (including sole parents). Policy initiatives recently considered by the Department include measures to assist the long term unemployed and low income families, to better target welfare payments, to formulate a retirement incomes policy and to encourage greater participation of disabled people in the workforce and other activities. To properly address such wide-ranging concerns, detailed analysis of a variety of reliable, relevant and timely statistics is required. The Department of Social Security makes extensive use of ABS data to provide a sound information base for formulating new policies, modifying existing programs and evaluating their effectiveness. Some Council members have suggested that longitudinal studies could be very useful for welfare policy analysis in providing information on the extent to which various conditions of disadvantage, such as poverty, remain over time for particular individuals.

Professor Kamel's paper explained that the Australian Institute of Health took a broad view of health which was consistent with current Government policies directed towards the encouragement of a healthy population, unlike previous policies which had tended to be sickness rather than health oriented. Since the health of the population depends on many different factors, including the social environment and the behaviour of individuals, the statistics required for its effective measurement encompass a wide field and are no longer confined to the traditional data collections on mortality, morbidity and the provision of medical services. As well as a broad range of demographic and socio-economic statistics, detailed data on groups known to have special health needs, such as Aborigines, women and migrants, are also required. Coordination of data collection was required to provide a proper basis for the informed decision-making needed to improve the health of the community more efficiently by directing resources into areas of most need. Such coordination involved the Australian Institute of Health and the ABS as well as State authorities and private organisations.

Dr Morgan's paper on privacy and statistics raised a number of current issues of concern, including the justification for compulsory collections, the appropriateness of making available compulsorily acquired data for marketing purposes, the extent to which technological change has eroded confidentiality protection measures, and the extent to which the privacy of small groups ('group' privacy) should be protected. Ever since its inception, Council has been keenly interested in privacy aspects of statistics and has considered various privacy matters on a number of previous occasions. From the useful discussion stimulated by Dr Morgan's paper it is clear that members consider the existing balance between ABS release practices

and privacy interests to be appropriate. However, Council firmly believes that privacy aspects of official statistics need to be kept under close scrutiny in a constantly changing environment.

Professor Tweedie's paper on the interaction of ABS and academic statisticians described the low degree of contact currently existing between academic statisticians and the ABS, something which he said represented neglect of a valuable resource. He suggested a number of measures to encourage closer contact, such as ABS study programs within universities and agreements to develop technical methodologies for specific ABS projects. Examples of projects suggested included development work associated with synthetic estimation and the construction of useful "front ends" for ABS electronic products, something which could considerably add to their value. Council notes that, while there is significant contact between academic economists, demographers and sociologists and the Bureau, the ABS has found it extremely difficult to attract academics through such devices as the offer of ABS Fellowships to participate in development work being undertaken within the Bureau. However, Council remains convinced of the potential benefits flowing from greater ABS involvement with the academic community and supports the ABS in continuing to offer attractive opportunities to academics.

General

In order to assist in the review of future work programs Council has requested that a paper be prepared by the Bureau on the appropriate balance in the allocation of statistical resources between different sectors of the economy, with particular reference to the status of the Agriculture program. The paper should be available during 1990-91.

With the objective of enhancing knowledge of the breadth and depth of Council membership and the range of topics considered, representatives of the Parliamentary press gallery were invited to attend the November meeting during the discussion on the National Health Survey and to join members for lunch. While the response was disappointing, those who attended gained a useful insight into the workings of Council.

As noted earlier in this Report, there has been a continuing cutback in resources available to the ABS which, combined with the demands for new and enhanced collections and the controversy which has been generated from unfounded criticisms, has placed great pressure on the staff at all levels. Despite this, new products have been developed and the Bureau has maintained its high standards. Council is grateful for the application and dedication of the staff.

Council wishes to record its appreciation for the assistance received from the Statistician and his officers in the presentation and comprehensiveness of information provided on the matters considered by Council and the courtesy and efficiency with which secretariat and other services have been made available.

APPENDIX

Freedom of Information Statement

Below is a statement, as required by section 8 of the *Freedom of Information Act 1982*, about the structure of the Australian Statistics Advisory Council (ASAC) and how members of the public can obtain access to information held by the Council.

Establishment, organisation and functions

See Introduction to this report (page 1).

Powers

As an advisory body, ASAC has no decision-making or other powers directly affecting members of the public. It does not administer any enactments or schemes.

Arrangements for outside participation

ASAC members are appointed by the Minister responsible for the ABS so that a broad range of views and interests is reflected in the advice that ASAC offers to the Minister and the Statistician. Membership details are given on pages iv-vi.

Persons or bodies outside the Commonwealth administration may participate in the Council's policy formulation by making representations to the Minister or the Chairman on matters of concern to them.

Categories of documents

No documents are held by ASAC which are open to public access on payment of a fee or customarily available free of charge. The annual report, which is tabled in Parliament, is available from all ABS offices. Files are maintained which contain documents relating to the administration of the Council, papers discussed at Council meetings and correspondence relating to the activities of the Council.

FOI procedures and initial contact points

All inquiries concerning access to documents, including inquiries under the *Freedom of Information Act 1982*, may be directed on weekdays, between 8.30am and 4.30pm, to the Secretary, Australian Statistics Advisory Council c/- Australian Bureau of Statistics, Cameron Offices, Belconnen, ACT 2617 - telephone (06) 2525256.

